

is this seat taken? by jakepurralta

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Summary:

“stood up by your date so someone just sits down and pretends they're your date so that people stop throwing pitying looks and it ends up being a great date” au

is this seat taken?

What am I doing here?

What am I doing here? What am I doing here? What am I doing here?

As the clock ruthlessly ticks on, the words start repeating themselves in Jonathan's head like a cruel mantra.

He's sitting behind a table in The Golden Spoon, a small restaurant that had just opened up in Hawkins and at the time, Jonathan had been really excited to try it out. It was a little on the expensive side, but he hardly ever went out anyway so he figured it'd be worth it for a nice girl.

But that was then and this is the harsh reality of now, and now his fingers are nervously drumming on the table as he tells the waitress (for the second time) that his dinner companion is just running a little late.

"Okay, well, just let me know if you need anything, okay?" the waitress says, a tone in her voice that Jonathan *knows* is pity. Any reasonable person could fit the puzzle pieces together and figure out that he's just another sucker that has been stood up.

He feels like such a loser.

"Ugh, I feel like such a loser!"

"Hey now," Barbara shushes her friend, who is sitting in front of her with her face buried in her hands. "women have fussed over men since the beginning of time, it's nothing to be ashamed about." She pauses momentarily, noticing the odd looks they've attracted from the tables around them. "But you *are* causing a scene right now and it's embarrassing to me."

Nancy lets her hands drop until they slam into the table with a thud, the cutlery on it protesting loudly. It earns them a disapproving glare from a nearby waitress, but Nancy can't be bothered to even notice.

"I just thought he was getting better, you know? I thought he really cared about me."

"Well, in a way I think he did."

Sceptical at the truth of that statement, Nancy tilts her head and gives her best friend a look. "If Steve cared about me he wouldn't have cheated on me."

Barbara shrugs her shoulders. "It's not like I'm excusing his actions or anything, but I think he did care about you in his own, sometimes douchey looking way. But he's also just another 19 year old kid who just wants to fit in and also can't seem to keep it in his pants. Maybe this slip up was the final nail in the coffin."

"Nail in the coffin?" Nancy repeats quizzically. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Now it's Barbara's turn to cock her head. "Nance. Come on. You can't tell me that all this time you weren't noticing the fact that you two were drifting apart from each other. You were hanging out less, you started to get more annoyed at him, sometimes you just went an entire day completely ignoring him."

In lieu of a vocal response, Nancy slumps back into her seat, knowing full well that Barbara is right. She has been avoiding Steve as much as she can lately, and whenever she had some time to herself, she really enjoyed it. Sometimes, when she heard footsteps outside her window, she'd even race to the darkest corner of her room and press herself to the wall until the knocking stopped and Steve left, assuming that she wasn't home.

(At least she thought that's what he thought. He ended up finding out what she'd been doing all this time and it resulted in a nasty fight.)

That's one of the reasons why she feels so pathetic right now. She's grieving the end of a relationship she *wanted* to see die, apparently.

Why does this even matter? If anything, I should be relieved right now. Steve and I are still on relatively good terms. I hate what he did, but I don't hate him.

All things considered, she's glad that she managed to end the relationship herself, her head held high in the process. She doesn't want to harbor any resentment towards Steve. It won't affect him as much as it will end up tormenting herself, anyway.

She lets out another upset huff and pushes her chair back. "I'm going to the bathroom."

Barbara, now actively working on enjoying her *dame blanche*, simply nods and makes a sound that could be, "see you later"" Barbara was never too worried about boys. Nancy thinks that maybe she can take an example in that.

She's almost on her feet when a sudden force (a human shaped force, she quickly notes) crashes into her side, almost knocking her into the table, face first into Barbara's *dame blanche*. Thankfully in the nick of time, she manages to grasp the side of the table, steadying herself.

The human force starts stammering instantly. "Oh- I am so sorry! I'm sorry, I didn't mean to- I'm sorry-"

She's still busy regaining her composure to properly acknowledge it at first. Barbara seems to be doing the same thing, because her mouth is half open, her ice cream filled dessert spoon still hanging in the air.

"I was just trying to get to the bathroom, but I had to avoid the waiter, and then I didn't notice you were there, so I just-" Nancy is finally looking at the culprit, who appears to be about her age with somewhat long, unkempt brown hair that falls into his face, and brown eyes that peer through. He's giving her an immensely apologetic look as pushes his hands forward, emulating a push. "I ended up sort of pushing you, though that wasn't my intention. I guess I was just distracted."

Finding an opening between all of his incoherent babbling, Nancy raises her hand to stop him, putting a small smile on her face to reassure him. "It's fine! Nothing bad happened. We're cool."

"Oh. Okay." He attempts to smile back but quickly shifts his gaze to the floor. He's shuffling around for a bit, almost like he's hesitating, or maybe he's waiting for something, until he finally turns on his heel

and continues his lopsided walk to the bathroom.

It was not enough to be a loser that was stood up, I also had to embarrass myself in front of strangers. That's it, I'm never going out again.

One hour and thirty minutes have passed since Jonathan first sat down, and his thoughts are getting more and more bitter by the minute. He wants to get up and leave, but he wouldn't know where to go. All he can do is go home, to a mother who knows he's supposed to be out on a date, and who's going to be asking him a million questions he doesn't want to answer.

"She didn't show up, mom. I guess she finally realized that going out with a Byers is basically social suicide." He can already imagine the way his mother's cheeks will flush with anger, criticizing him for succumbing to the public's opinion on them while she tells him that he could not be more wrong.

He'd rather sit here and feel pathetic for another two hours than disappoint his mother.

His eyes drift to the side, where the girl he had just bumped into is still sitting with her friend. *At least she's having a good time.* Her red haired friend is saying something and she's laughing. The happiness in her face is expressed all the way to her eyes, and Jonathan finds himself smiling at that, wishing he could feel the same.

He orders a drink for himself, and maybe it's the hydration, but it gives him the courage to admit (to himself) that the stranger is actually strikingly beautiful. A tiny voice inside his head wishes that she was sitting here, laughing at *his* jokes.

"Alright, ready to go?" Barbara is reaching for her purse when she notices that Nancy is looking off to her side. Making the connection to where Nancy's looking, she gets her friend's attention by poking her in the arm with her index finger. "Hey. Stop staring. It's creepy."

Barbara isn't sure if Nancy even heard her at all when she mutters, "Did you notice that guy's been sitting there for like two hours? He

hasn't even eaten anything."

"It's weird that you noticed that."

Nancy rolls her eyes. "If you ask me, that looks like a typical case of 'stood up by date'. He doesn't look particularly happy, either."

"So? Why do you even care?" Barbara says, scrunching up her nose. Nancy is silent for a while and almost looks like she's about to drop it when a knowing smirk starts to appear on Barbara's face. "Oh...I see. I didn't know that the slouchy, mysterious types were your thing too. I always thought you were into popular jocks."

"Okay, first of all," Nancy begins, knowing that she already sounds extremely defensive. "I don't have a *type*. I didn't fall for Steve just because he was popular and into sports, I liked him because he was a nice guy. Second of all, I am not attracted to *him*." In a very high-strung fashion, she jerks her thumb into the stranger's direction. "I just *empathize* with him. He seemed like a nice guy, I don't think he deserves to be treated like this."

"Well, if you don't think he deserves to be treated like this, why don't you go out there and be a good sport, huh? Go sit with him. Give him a good time."

"Barb! I'm not gonna do that!" Nancy hisses defensively, a nasty flush instantly creeping up her cheeks. "I don't even *know* him."

Barbara laughs full-heartedly. "Not *that* kind of good time. God, get your mind out of the gutter. Prove to me that he's not the kind of guy you'd date by sitting with him and not-dating him, like a friend would."

Nancy sits back and purses her lips together, much like a pouty toddler. "I have nothing to prove to you."

Barb's response comes with a shrug and a cool, "Okay."

Nancy feels the need to cross her arms for good measure. "I don't."

"That's what you just said. Let's go, then."

Nancy knows Barbara is teasing her, so she puts her foot down.

"I *don't*."

Two more minutes.

Jonathan takes his eyes off his watch, deciding to just change his plans and eat dinner alone. He could just get up leave, but he feels bad about having taken this spot for so long and not even ordering anything. Plus, maybe it'll make him feel less pathetic if it seems like dining alone was his plan all along.

What he certainly didn't expect is for someone to approach his table and yank him out of his train of thought with words that bewilder him to say the least. "Is this seat taken?"

Much to his dismay, he starts off with a stutter. "I- Uh, well- no, I suppose not. Um...why?"

He finally looks up and into the eyes of the girl he had just (literally) bumped into. She offers him a sheepish smile and he wonders if maybe she's messing with him. Like maybe he'll say 'no' and she'll pretend to sit down, only to scramble back up and run out the restaurant with her red-headed friend, laughing maniacally in the process.

The girl (who is, by the way, far too beautiful to be spending time talking to *him* he thinks) rolls her eyes a little. "My friend wants to go home, but I've barely eaten. I could use another bite, frankly."

His forehead is still crinkled in confusion (and moderate wariness) and she wonders if it'll be a permanent look for the rest of the night. "Come on..." she drones on, wondering if he'll get her point.

He does. "Uh, Jonathan," he quickly fills in for her. "My name's Jonathan."

She smiles again. "Come on, Jonathan." He swallows, thinking to himself that he loves the way his name sounds on her tongue. "Haven't you ever had a little adventure? A fun story to tell your friends? It doesn't always have to involve stuff like jumping off cliffs

or flying to foreign countries. Sometimes, having dinner with a stranger will suffice."

Jonathan looks away, seemingly weighing his options. After a moment, he turns back to her and nods his head. "Okay."

"Okay," she repeats vigorously, and moves to sit on the stool in front of him. "And don't you worry, I can pay for my food myself."

It's a turn of events Nancy hadn't expected.

A few hours ago, Barbara had picked her up from home, insisting that they go out for dinner to forget about all that drama with Steve, and now she's sitting here, eating dinner with a complete stranger.

Okay, to be honest, he's not a complete stranger now.

In a matter of minutes, he's telling her that his name is Jonathan Byers, that he just moved to town and is also about to attend Hawkins High School, that he has a little brother named Will, that he doesn't have many friends (none, he admits after a while. He's very honest, she notices that too) and that he was stood up by his date. Their eyes meet for a brief second at the end of that confession until he drops his to the ground in embarrassment.

This angers Nancy a little more than she expected it would. Sure, there's a possibility that he's flat out lying about everything, but if her gut feeling is to be trusted, this guy is a genuinely nice person who doesn't deserve to be stood up and disrespected like this. In fact, he's great company. Even if a girl would not have any interest in dating him, he has enough stories to tell to keep you entertained throughout the night.

He doesn't say much. But the words he does utter seem to be chosen carefully.

So in a way, he actually says much more.

"I think we should show them." Nancy hears herself saying boldly, after she's finished telling him about what Steve did and after she's

had plenty of time processing (trying to figure out) why some fool would ditch on Jonathan.

He squints his eyes a little, looking puzzled. It's quite an endearing look on him, she silently notes in the back of her mind. "What?"

"We should *show* them," Nancy repeats, louder this time. "Steve and Catherine, we're *great* company. If they were on dates with us right now, they would be having the time of their lives!"

He's not really catching on to her energy just yet, but he straightens his back, widens his eyes and listens intently. All she needs to do is reel him in.

"We should make this the best date ever. To prove to them that we don't need them."

She sits back with a triumphant smirk on her face, reading him as he ponders her suggestion. She doesn't really know why, but she kind of really wants to lean over the table, reach out to him and brush that hair away from his eyes. She thinks that it might be one of his coping mechanisms of having to live in a world that means you have to constantly deal with social interaction. "I don't like most people," he had told her earlier that night, and she believes him, because ever since she sat down he has been wearing his heart on his sleeve. (She also wonders if she's the exception.) She always had to ask first if she wanted to know something about him, but she never once thought he was lying to her about anything.

After a beat, he carefully makes eye contact with her again, looking unsure. "How did you want to do this?"

"Well, I think we should start with the first realistic step." She knows she has to ease him into this, and thinks that if she tries too much too soon, he might literally bolt. She sucks in a breath, shoves aside her own insecurity. "Do I look like someone you'd ever want to date?"

"Yes." he responds, more quickly than either of them had anticipated. She's staring at him with wide eyes, momentarily unsure of how to proceed and he looks away, feeling remorseful for his utter lack of composure.

So she decides she'll have to be the one to carry on the conversation. "Um...well, good. So I suppose the first step would be to ask me out."

He looks back at her in surprise. "Really?" When she offers him nothing but a pointed look, he runs his fingers through his hair, mumbles something about it being embarrassing (though he suppresses a chuckle) but he does end up complying.

"Nancy?"

"Yes?"

"Would you like to go out with me tonight?"

She's silent for a while and lets the tension soak in the air, nearly causing Jonathan to think she's about to call it off and laugh at him for it. But she doesn't. "I would love to."

He's smiling and breathing through his mouth, feeling the way his heart is banging wildly inside his chest. How is it possible that asking a girl he met just hours ago on a fake date is giving him more of an adrenaline rush than asking Catherine, a girl he had his eyes on for months?

As he finds repose again, he thinks to himself that may have been an excellent clue. Jonathan has never really *liked* a girl before. Then there was Catherine, and he was *fascinated* by her. Fascinated by her shiny black hair, her interesting choice of attire, and the way she seemed to get along with everyone. Joyce had picked up on this and urged him to take the plunge, even though Jonathan insisted that he didn't really know what it is that he truly felt for her.

Sitting here with Nancy, he begins to understand that it never extended beyond fascination.

He kind of wants to run home and tell his mom that 'no, it turns out I'm not in love with Catherine' but his newfound attraction to Nancy keeps him seated as she finishes her meal and asks for the check. Jonathan is still reeling but doesn't miss the fact that some male restaurant goers around him are giving them odd looks as asking for

the check is usually the male's task when dining with a woman.

But Jonathan can't bring himself to care. Nancy is much more than the gender roles that society is trying so hard to impose on them, and he feels like she knows this herself. More power to her.

"You sure can get inside your head there, can't you?"

She startles him by lightly tapping him on the side of his head and snakes her arm through his as they wander through the cold November streets, passing clapboard buildings and bustling bars that are filled to the brim with animated townspeople. Nancy's so close to him, the side of her body occasionally brushing against his as they move forward, and Jonathan suddenly feels very, very naked somehow. Not literally, maybe. He is wearing a thick sweater and a winter coat after all. But he doesn't remember the last time a girl has ever willingly touched him so affectionately like this.

Soft disclosure to himself: he likes this. He likes her arm linked together with his. It makes him feel needed, wanted.

But he's terrified of acknowledging this too loudly (even in his head) in fear of it leaving him feeling wrecked and empty when she inevitably pulls away.

That reality might come too soon when he feels her shift under his arm, her gaze burning the side of his skull. Finally grasping the fact that he's been quiet for *minutes* now, he quickly excuses himself. "Sorry. I tend to do that a lot. I just sort of space out and dissociate from the real world."

She nods in kind understanding. "You must have a lot to think about." He smiles at the ground in lieu of a response. "I'd love to hear your thoughts about tonight. I bet you didn't expect to be walking home with a girl you just met."

His face breaks out into a lively grin. "I was expecting to have to come up with a better story to tell my mom about Catherine, because it'd break her heart knowing that she didn't even show up. I was thinking I'd tell her an elaborate lie about how she *did* show up and I

was a gentleman the entire night, but we just didn't click so there's no second date."

Nancy shares a laugh with him, and he feels oddly at peace when she leans into his shoulder in doing so. "You sound like a guy who'd have a lot of difficulty lying to your mother about that. What's better: trying to get through a huge lie or me?"

"You. It's definitely you."

He really is a perfect gentleman that night. He treats her like she's really his date: he gives her his undivided attention whenever she speaks, offers a gentle heads up when she's about to step into a puddle, and he even slips out of his coat to drape it over her shoulder at the first sign of trembling. (Her protests are in vain because her own coat is no match against the piercing cold. When they continue their walk, and she's grasping the sides of his coat to keep it over her shoulders, she has to admit - not out loud, though - that she likes the warmth that it's enveloping over her, with just the slightest hint of his smell. It's comforting.)

When she asks him about his behavior, he simply shrugs and tells her that he watches romantic comedies with his mother sometimes. Nancy can't help but think that many of the boys in her class would have rather gotten punched in the face than admit that out loud, but Jonathan is honest with her and unaffected by what his peers think of him. She really, really likes that about him.

Granted, his life is far from ideal.

The walls he has built around himself are sturdy and it makes it hard for her to see what truly gets to him besides the snippets he offers her every now and then. She's come to realize that his family is a passionate subject for him: his mother and brother: good. His father: not so good. That's the line she can't cross yet, but the line she wants to cross. She just wants to know about him.

God, she just wants to throw her arms around his neck and squeeze him so hard that all the bad memories go away. His father making him kill animals, telling him he'll be more of a man for it (what does

that even mean anyway, Jonathan ponders out loud, and she doesn't have an answer for him), and then leaving a then little Jonathan broken as Joyce is replaced in favor of a younger woman.

Now, Jonathan is older, and somewhere deep inside, he's still broken.

That's when it hits her: on just *one* date she already learned more about him and his past than she did in *four* dates with Steve. Steve's date weren't bad, not at all. But with him it was always more about charming smiles, constant compliments and sneaky kisses.

This...this feels new. They haven't kissed once, and Nancy still considers this one of the most intimate and personal dates she's ever been on. This is uncharted territory for her, the both of them, laying it out in the open like this.

But he's telling her these things because apparently he trusts her now, and that makes her feel very good about herself.

Jonathan has always taken pride in his ability to silently read people. Especially through a camera lens, it was easy to see what truths people were trying to hide, truths that came out through something physical: their facial expression, body posture, stuff like that.

But as they're approaching Nancy's house (which is much bigger and *cleaner* than his, he notes), he looks to his side and can only conclude that he cannot read her expression. They walk up the steps to her door and he feels a pang of disappointment as she unlinks her arm from his and goes to unlock her door.

She's silent in the process, and for a moment Jonathan wonders if she's going to pull a *Jonathan* on him. That's what he sometimes does to people: he slips away from them in silence, because he's too awkward to say something or maybe too much time has passed and he feels like a fool for not having said anything as simple as 'bye'.

But fortunately when she opens the door she only opens it slightly, turning back around to face him. "Thanks for the date, Jonathan" Her hand is still on the doorknob, hesitant to move away from him without adding something else.

By the way he's frozen still on the ground, it seems like it's up to her again to make the first move.

So she releases her grip, steps forward, and quietly pulls him in for a hug. He doesn't react at first, letting his arms hang to her side for a moment, before he places them on the small of her back and they stand there for a long yet comforting moment, holding each other in a warm embrace.

She finally pulls away after a minute and offers him a kind smile as she steps back towards her house. "You said you're also going to attend Hawkins High School. So I guess you'll see me around."

He smiles back, a smile that's more crooked and messy looking when compared to her perfect teeth, but it's still genuine and so like him. "I think I will."

She watches him as he starts to turn back and off into the dark of night. He's about to step off their front lawn, when suddenly, he stops in his tracks and spins around. "Nancy?"

Nancy's body jerks in surprise at this and she quickly uses her hands to tuck her hair behind her ears in an attempt to distract herself from feeling so flustered that he just caught her staring at him. She takes in a deep breath, attempts to control her voice. "Yes?"

He's either oblivious or he wants to spare her feelings, but he doesn't seem to respond in any way to her nervous antics. "I just realized I don't know your last name."

Due to the fact that he's still standing at the far end of the lawn, he has to speak up for her to hear, but even like this, she can still hear the softness in his voice and has difficulty hearing it from afar. All she hears is something about a name, and after a moment she decides to guess her answer out of context. "Wheeler. Nancy Wheeler."

He nods his head at that, and Nancy lets out a small sigh of relief knowing that she guessed right. "What's yours?" Her own voice carries far more weight than his, and she hopes she didn't just scare him off.

"Jonathan Byers." He waits for her to indicate that she has heard him properly, and when she does, he gives her a modest grin that disappears far too quickly for her taste. "Good night, Nancy Wheeler."

The cold breeze slides over Nancy's arms and she folds them over her chest as she watches his figure grow smaller and smaller until it disappears around the corner.

Her voice is barely audible even to herself. "Good night, Jonathan Byers."

It's weird.

Nancy feels like she had just gone back in time. Back to when she first had a crush on Steve, and she just came home from their first date. She's locking the door behind her, the smile on her face just won't fade, and her brain is hard at work replaying all the events of tonight. She's just barely not sliding down the door to sit on the floor, clutching her chest with a satisfied and dreamy 'ahh'.

But it's not *exactly* the same. This time, it's not Steve, but Jonathan.

And her heart is...*full*.

She can't think of another way of putting it. The best part of tonight is that she felt like there were no stakes for her. At the time, she didn't know if she liked him. She was just having a good time. And he was being honest with her and he even made her laugh a few times, something she didn't expect at all from someone who, well, slouched and had a perpetually somber look on his face when he didn't think anyone was watching.

None of that 'I hope he'll call me in the morning' and recounting the night's events, trying to identify moments where she could have possibly made a fool out of herself.

Nope, for the first time in a long time she feels like she really spent the night genuinely enjoying her companion and she was being completely herself. It feels good, knowing that that is possible.

"Oh, hey sweetie," her mother calls from the kitchen before Nancy

got the chance to sneak upstairs. "Barb called. I thought you were having dinner with her?"

Nancy just swings her body over the side of the railing, knowing that it'll be much more difficult to give her mother a vague answer (that's not technically a lie) when she's saying it straight to her face. "Yeah, we did, but I ran into some friends and Barb wanted to go home early. Did she want me to call her back?"

Karen doesn't seem suspicious of her daughter's answer, or maybe she just lets it slide like does with so many things involving Nancy's behavior lately. It's part of teenage rebellion anyway, and both Nancy and Karen know that it's not going by completely unnoticed. "Yes, she did. It seemed pretty urgent."

"Okay, thanks."

"So, tell me *everything*. How was it? Did you have fun?"

Jonathan can't help but laugh at his mother's playful excitement, who is approaching him and looking like she's about to corner and trap him until he gives her some answers. He holds his hands up defensively. "Mom, please, I barely got through the door."

She points a finger at him. "Well, I see a *smile*. So something good happened." He just gives her a look for that. "Hey, don't blame me. I'm your *mother*. I can be curious about the girls in your life. And this one's the first, so it's special."

Jonathan hangs his coat over the coat rack. "Well, it's not Catherine, let's just start off with that. She didn't show up."

"What?" Joyce's facial expression turns from happy to sour in just a blink. "That is incredibly rude." She pauses, taps her finger on her chin a few times. Then, "Wait. You said, 'let's just start off with that', so that's not even the story. What happened? Did you drive over to her place? Did you give her a piece of your mind? Oh, I'd love to do that right about now. Nobody ignores my son."

Jonathan chuckles, stepping around his mom, though not before

giving her a comforting pat on the shoulder first. "It's all good, mom. I- I actually met someone else." He continues talking as he wanders over to the kitchen, knowing that his mother is following suit, hanging on his every word. "Her name is Nancy. Nancy Wheeler. She's actually-"

"Wait. Nancy *Wheeler*?"

Jonathan turns back around to his mother. "Yeah. You know her?"

Joyce stares at him blankly for a while, before breaking out into laughter. "I actually dropped *Will* over at the Wheeler's just this morning for a playdate with their son Mike and a bunch of other kids. I picked them up two hours ago and it seemed like they were all becoming great friends."

"Really?"

"Yeah! What are the odds that you run into their eldest daughter?"

Jonathan feels just as amazed at his mother at the revelation. He doesn't really believe in fate but he has to admit that this is a very funny coincidence.

For a moment, they both just stand around thinking about it until Joyce recollects herself. "So, you were saying that you met Nancy?"

"Not only met her, it turned into a fake date with her." When Joyce raised her eyebrows at that, Jonathan continued, "We were both talking about other people. You know, me about Catherine and how she didn't show up, and Nancy about her ex. Steve, I think. She suddenly said, 'we should show them' and suggested we turn the night into a date to show them that we don't need them. We ended up having a pretty good time, actually."

"Wow. She sounds like a clever girl."

"She really is." Jonathan replies absent-mindedly, silently telling himself that remark came out sounding very smitten.

If it didn't make him feel so contented right now, it would've been enough reason for him to sound the alarm and get worried.

"Oh my god." Barb says on the phone as Nancy is sitting on her bed, trying to contain her friend's outburst. "Oh my god." She must've said that seven times by now. "Nance, do you even hear yourself right now?"

"What?" Nancy responds innocently, though she knows exactly where her friends is going to go next.

"One fake date with this guy and you're already falling for him. See? He's your type!"

"He's not my- I don't have a type, alright? I like him because he's honest and kind and he's a good listener and he-" Nancy cuts herself off, bites her bottom lip before continuing. "He's a good person. That doesn't mean that I *like* him. As more than a potential friend, that is."

"Alright, whatever it is that you want to convince yourself." Nancy grits her teeth, not liking the condescending tone of Barbara's voice. "As long as you remember that disregarding your own feelings is a stupid waste of time for both you and him. And frankly, me, because you're spending my time talking to me about this."

Nancy huffs in offense. "Wow! Sorry to bother you with my friendship, *Barb*."

"You're not *bothering* me, Nancy, you know that. I just want you to be honest with me for one time tonight. Jonathan, would you ever date a guy like him? Or, what I'm basically asking, him?"

Nancy sighs in exasperation, but answers regardless. "Yes. After tonight, I'd be interested in dating Jonathan. Not a guy like him. Just...you know." It feels weird to say that out loud, but in a way she's relieved to get it off her chest.

She's too busy thinking about that, she almost misses Barb saying, "Him. Oh man, you're in so deep."

She's not sure what she wants, but she does know that she doesn't want him to leave.

She thinks that he's the kind of person who simply *retreats*, make themselves invisible, irrelevant to a point. And when she can't find him at school for the first week, she realizes she wasn't wrong. It's not like he's actively avoiding her, he just always eats lunch alone and class participation is kept to a bare minimum.

She finally finds him in the school's dark room, hunched over a couple of pictures he's developing. As she stands in the door frame, watching him completely focused and in his element, she thinks to herself that it nice seeing him like this. Whenever she's looking at him, really looking at him, there's always a sort of underlying sadness on his face, like he's worried about something. But it's not like she can just ask him about it, because if it's something he's been harboring for years it may have simply become part of him.

A minute ticks by and Nancy tells herself that it's time to make her presence known, though she doesn't really know what to say to him. She opts for, "Hey, stranger." He spins around in surprise, and she steps forward to stand next to him, internally cringing at her choice of words.

"Hey." he breathes, looking a little dazed. "What are you doing here?"

She shrugs. "I haven't seen you around since that night. I thought we both agreed that we were going to see each other around at school, at the very least." She doesn't mean to sound like she's accusing him, but he does drop his head at her remark.

"Yeah, sorry. I guess I just...thought that was just a one night thing."

Nancy watches him as he actively avoids her gaze. It's hard to make out, but it's almost like he's blushing. "Hey." She shifts her weight a little, nudges him with her shoulder. "I had a good time."

That seems to alleviate his nerves a little. "I had a fun time on our fake date, too."

Fake date. Nancy bites her lip, tries not to think too hard about the brief twitch of pain she feels at his words. It's not like it was ever intended to be a real date, anyway. But if it was, what was the harm in that? It doesn't matter anyway. He's being pretty clear about how

he feels they should proceed, and it's by considering that night a fun, *fake* date and just move on. As friends, hopefully.

So she shoves whatever feelings she's experiencing right now aside and straightens her posture. "So, how does developing photographs even work?"

They continue as friends. Awkward friends, at first, because Nancy really is Jonathan's first real friend so there are a lot of things he still needs to learn. But he's patient and willing to learn and always honest with her, and to be honest, that's more than enough for her.

Neither of them have eaten at The Golden Spoon since, both they both feel like they have good memories from the place. Jonathan and Nancy still sometimes get asked about that night (mostly by their families) and they always answer, but it never seems to be enough. It's like people want to hear *more* than what actually happened. They give each other looks whenever it happens again (like what's that all about?) but never actually talk about it.

Because Nancy's mother and Barb (and even Mike, to an extent) know about the way Nancy's tone of voice shifts ever so slightly whenever she talks about Jonathan.

Joyce Byers (who passes this along to Will) knows about Jonathan's tiny smiles whenever he mentions Nancy.

They all know that the night in question meant more to Jonathan and Nancy than they're ready to admit, and that their time will come. But for now, they're young enough to bask in teenage confusion.

Author's Note:

woops, kind of tacked on the ending on this one. hope you liked it regardless :) (i don't know the definition of a 'great date', i hate all that over-the-top mushy gushy stuff. if you ask me, a stroll home with someone who genuinely cares about you is

enough??)